



Wilson's Creek National Battlefield

Teacher's Guide for the Historic Ray House

20 – 30 minutes

Theme:

The dramatic events of August 10th, 1861 forever changed the lives of local residents. While members of the John Ray family may have personally experienced the violence and suffering brought about by this battle, they were simply the first of many Missourians forced to become involved in a war they would rather have ignored.

After articulating relevant goals, learning objectives, and both the Home's importance and teaching potential, this guide goes on to list a series of talking points regarding the "Wire" Road, as well as the House's front porch, Lyon room, post office/children's room, kitchen, and back yard.

Goal:

To provide visitors the opportunity to gain a better understanding of how the civilian population of the area was affected by the events of August 10th, 1861

Objectives:

By the end of the program visitors will be able to:

- explain the typical daily life of the Ray family before the battle.
- describe how the events of August 10th impacted the lives of the John Ray family.
- summarize the role of slavery both in Missouri and in Southwest Missouri in particular.

Importance:

- The Ray House is a structure that was here on the day of the battle; approximately 80% of it is original.
- The House was used as a Confederate field hospital during and after the battle.
- The House was the place where General Lyon's body was examined after his death.
- Period furnishings in the house help us to understand how local farm families lived in the 1850s and 1860s.
- The House was a mail stop for the transcontinental Butterfield Overland Stage Company; Mr. Ray was the postmaster for Wilson's Creek Township from 1856 to 1866.

What the Ray House Helps Us Learn:

1. How farming families lived in the mid-1800s.
2. The difference in the day-to-day lives of slaves and masters in Southwest Missouri, as compared to those on the large hemp and tobacco plantations in central Missouri or "Little Dixie."

The significance of Missouri as a divided border state, with some slave holders (like John and Roxanne Ray) supporting the Union.

3. Both the role played by the Ray children during and after the battle, as well as the roles they played in daily life on a 19th century farmstead.
4. How the Civil War affected civilians living on or near battlefields .

Instructional Talking Points:

The Wire Road

- The Road directly in front of the Ray House ran southwesterly from Springfield to Fayetteville, Arkansas and through many smaller towns and villages in between.
- It became known as the Wire (or Telegraph) Road because the telegraph line that connected Springfield with Fayetteville was mounted on poles (and sometimes trees) adjacent to the Road.
- As originally laid out in the 1830's, the Road ran from north of Springfield to Fort Smith, Arkansas in order to connect with other roads that eventually led to San Francisco, California.
- The Butterfield Overland Stage carried both passengers and the mail over this road in the late 1850's; hence, it was also called the "Butterfield" road.
- The Ray House served as a mail stop for the stage because Mr. Ray was the U.S. Postmaster for Wilson's Creek Township.
- The Wire Road was the main route Lyon's Union soldiers used prior to the battle.
- The Road was also used by marching armies throughout the remainder of the Civil War.

The Front Porch

- From the front porch Mr. Ray was able to watch most of the battle unfold.
- Visitors can see the battlefield pretty much as Mr. Ray did – from the porch.
- The Cornfield Fight:
 1. Mr. Ray's cornfield became the site of fighting between Union soldiers under Captain Plummer and Confederate forces under General McCulloch.
 2. The cornfield is visible just behind the Ray springhouse and outlined by a split-rail fence.
- Confederate artillery (Woodruff's Pulaski Arkansas Battery) was located on a hill above the Wire Road just south of the Ray House.
 1. Cannon fire from that spot stopped Lyon's advance on Bloody Hill.
 2. Plummer's federals were unsuccessful at silencing the battery because of McCulloch's Confederates.
- Bloody Hill:
 1. Bloody Hill is clearly visible from the porch.
 2. Look for the three high tension towers in the distance just to the left. This was the location of the most intense and sustained fighting at this battle.
- Ray's Side Yard
 1. The yard on the south side of the porch (Lyon Room side) was the site of Ray's outhouse and chicken coop.
 2. The Confederate soldiers who were driven out of Mr. Ray's cornfield by fire from Du Bois' Union battery on Bloody Hill ran to take shelter at the Ray Farmstead. With Federal cannon rounds following on the heels of their retreat, one hit the corner of Mr. Ray's chicken coop

and exploded in the garden. The Confederates then put up the yellow hospital flag in front of the House and all federal cannon fire on that location stopped.

The Lyon Room

- The room on the right side of the porch facing the house is the “Lyon Room,” so named because the bed on which General Lyon’s body was laid is in this room.
- Original accounts indicate this room may have been where Mr. Ray conducted his duties as Postmaster. The National Park Service has chosen to place the Lyon bed in this room in order to more properly secure it.
- Artifacts:
 1. Lyon bed: The bed in this room is the bed that belonged to Mr. Ray and his wife Roxanna on August 10, 1861. At the end of the day, General Lyon’s body was laid on this bed to be examined by Dr. Melcher (a local physician). A pen and ink drawing in the display case by the bed depicts Dr. Melcher bent over General Lyon’s body while General Rains of the Missouri State Guard and Mrs. Ray look on.
 2. Mrs. Ray supplied a counterpane (coverlet) to cover General Lyon’s body when it was transported to Springfield to be kept at the house of Mary Phelps, the wife of Congressman John Phelps. The counterpane displayed in this room actually stands in for the real one, which is on display in the Visitor’s Center.
 3. Spinning wheel: The spinning wheel is believed to have been owned by Mrs. Ray, although it post-dates the battle. Most rural families in the nineteenth century made their own clothing by spinning thread made from wool, flax, or cotton, then weaving that yarn into cloth, cutting out clothing pieces from homemade patterns and sewing the pieces together by hand. Mrs. Ray and her daughters would have been engaged in such activity on a regular basis.
 4. Spinner’s “weasel “ (or clock reel): a mechanical yarn measuring device; two rotations of the wheel caused an internal mechanism to make a popping sound, indicating that the proper length of yarn for weaving had been achieved. This is one possibility of the origins of the song, “Pop Goes the Weasel”
 5. Chamber pot: restrooms in the nineteenth century were located outside the house, (which were known as a privies or outhouses). At night a “chamber pot” was used instead and was emptied out in the morning. This would have likely been one of the girl’s jobs. This chamber pot is made of porcelain, indicating that the Rays were prosperous enough to afford one that was “leak and odor proof.”
 6. Cradle or crib: smaller children (newborn and toddler) often slept in the same room as their parents in a cradle or small crib. This allowed the mother to be near her children without having them in the adult bed.

Post Office/Children’s Bedroom

- After exiting the Lyon Room you will enter the second bedroom. Two beds are set up here, along with a desk to interpret Mr. Ray’s duties as the local Postmaster.
- As previously mentioned, Mr. Ray was appointed U.S. Postmaster for Wilson Creek Township in 1856 and served in that capacity until 1866.
- Artifacts:

1. Desk: On the desk are copies of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, and postal reports that Mr. Ray submitted to the Postmaster General. A cash box is also present, which would have been used to sell postage stamps to patrons. Mr. Ray was assisted in his duties by Mr. Julius Short who helped to deliver mail to patrons who were willing to pay an additional fee for this service. Otherwise, postal patrons came to the Ray House to pick up their mail. Mr. Ray was a slave holder, but he remained loyal to the Union. We know this because he was able to keep his federal Postmaster job. Had he favored the southern cause he would not have kept his federal job.
2. Beds: The two beds in this room represent where the older children slept. Since the Rays had 11 children, several children shared one bed, which was typical for the time. Each bed is a rope bed, which means that instead of a box spring mattress there are ropes stretched over the wooden frame upon which the tick mattress is laid. The mattress would have been stuffed with feathers, straw, hay, grass, or cotton batting. The ropes had to be tightened regularly so the children could "sleep tight", and the mattress had to be routinely checked for insects that would have come in with the straw or grass filling, so the "bed bugs would not bite".
3. Fireplace: the fireplace is original to the Ray House. It was primarily used for heating once the double-sided fireplace was constructed in the kitchen.

Kitchen

- The double-sided fireplace served not only for cooking but for heating as well.
- A variety of chores were performed by Mrs. Ray, the Ray children, the family's female slave (called "Aunt Rhoda") and her children. These chores included churning butter, preparing daily meals, cleaning and putting away dishes, daily cleaning, and outdoor chores such as cutting and splitting firewood, feeding live stock (Mr. Ray had 50 hogs and 5 horses plus cattle and several chickens).
 1. Dishes were washed in tubs on a table known as a dry sink. The table was also used for food preparation.
 2. Cooking was done in the fireplace on skillets and in iron pots and Dutch ovens. The plaster walls helped keep the kitchen cooler in the summer months, but doors and windows were kept open during the day to help cool the house.
- Cellar entrance: The cellar is accessed by a trapdoor in the northwest corner of the kitchen. During the battle Aunt Rhoda gathered up all the children and, along with Mrs. Ray and Julius Short, the family's hired man, took shelter in the cellar.
- During and after the battle, wounded soldiers from both sides were treated inside the Ray house, including the kitchen. Doors were removed and made to serve as operating tables. The Ray family, Aunt Rhoda and her children all helped by getting water, making bandages, and caring for the wounded as best they could.

Backyard

- Mr. Ray's barn, corn crib, and other outbuildings were located in the back yard.
 1. All of the children performed a variety of daily farm chores in and around the barn yard both before and after the battle.
 2. Confederate and State Guard soldiers helped themselves to Mr. Ray's livestock, leaving him with virtually nothing after the battle was over. This was true for all of the families in the valley of Wilson Creek.

- Aunt Rhoda's cabin was probably located in the back part of the farmstead as well. Typically in a family that owned only a few slaves, the master and his family may have worked alongside their slaves, but slaves lived in separate quarters.